

# THE LAST STRAW

## BY HAROLD TITUS

An Exciting Western Romance of Adventure and Love

**Broke, disheartened, a New York society girl suddenly finds herself heiress to a vast Western cattle ranch. This thrilling story tells of the life she found there, and of how she won fortune, a home and happiness.**

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SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

After she had inherited a great cattle ranch in the West, she went to the ranch, determined to run it. Her first day was a great success, which she due to the simple goodness of the people. She had a great day, and she was very happy. She had a great day, and she was very happy. She had a great day, and she was very happy.

### CHAPTER X.

(Continued.)

THEY made an early start, riding out of the ranch just as the sun topped the heights to the eastward. Dew hung heavily on the sage from which fresh, clean fragrance rose as their horses stirred the brush. Their shadows were thrown far in advance as they followed a narrow gulch and the sunlight was caught and concentrated and scattered again as the drops fell from leaf and twig.

The girl breathed deeply of the light, sweet air and looked at Beck with a little laugh as of relief.

They climbed out of the gulch, horse sweating loudly as they made the last steep ascent and gained the ridge they were to follow and there was little more talk until they stopped and sat looking down across the great flat-bottomed cavity of Devil's Hole. It was a pear-shaped depression, perhaps four miles from rim to rim at the widest point and fully a score of miles in length. Its sides were sprinkled with cedars which clung to the sheer cliffs determinedly, but its bottom blanketed with thrifty sage brush, purple in the sunlight that was just then slanting across the floor, and beneath this sheen they could see the bright green of new grasses. A dark line marked with the clarity of a map the course of the creek and half way down toward the neck of the hole was a small cabin erected by the man who had filed on the land for Colonel Hunter and who had drifted on without establishing title.

"There's your neighbor," Beck said.

Jane looked for a moment, then lifted her eyes to the country which showed through the narrow outlet of the deep valley. Behind her endless ridges tossed upward to a sharp horizon, but out through that gap the range lay in a vast basin, rising gently to diminutive lavender bushes plastered against the sky many miles away. It seemed soft and vague and unreal . . . like one of the unreal paintings Beck had seen hanging within walls.

Tom led the way through trees and among upstanding ledges of rock into the narrow, dangerous trail and as he went down, his big roan picking the way quickly yet cautiously, he half turned in his saddle to explain the significance of the descent.

It was the only access on that side of the hole. There was one trail on the far side, so steep and hazardous that a man must lead his horse either up or down. The only other outlet was through the narrow gap where the wash of flood water during storms had made the going easy for men and stock. Out to the north-west, however, lay much Jane had heard of, a glimpse, well enough to use for range in three seasons, but in summer it became parched and used less. In the winter cattle could feed there on the abundant grama, could drink from the creek, but getting them out and over the divide to the more plentiful water of Coyote Creek was an undertaking.

"That's the danger," he told her. "It's a long, hard climb for stock in good shape, but if anything should happen to prevent your stock from drinking down here and they should get low from lack of water, why then you'd leave a lot of 'em down there if you tried to bring 'em out."

He pointed out the abrupt drop at his left where a pebble would find hundreds of feet before striking again and as he indicated his right cheek scrubbed the face of the bluff, so narrow was the way to which they clung.

Finally they reached the flat and swung along at a trot through the brush sage.

"There's water here now," he explained, as they followed the steep creek bank, "but that does not mean that you can't get water. The creek sinks when it don't rain and it's been coming up in just one spot for years. That's what makes a nest dangerous for you."

They approached the cabin. A mare and a newly born colt eyed them suspiciously. An ancient wagon, its top tattered, with three red wheels, stood close beside a frail corral. Fire wood was scattered about; here was an axe with a broken head, there a rust-eaten shovel, and the whole place spoke of poverty.

And yet piled against the cabin was spool upon spool of new barbed wire!

"Fence?" muttered Beck.

"But Mr. Hepburn said—"

"Yeah, I recall what he said."

Just then the canvas which served as a door was thrown back and the girl stepped out. She stood just across the threshold looking at them, sudden and defiant.

"Good morning," said Jane.

"Howdy," replied the girl indifferently.

An awkward pause. Surely, she would volunteer no more and Beck asked:

"Your dad around?"

"What do you want with him?"—a demand rather than a question.

"I am Miss Hunter. I own the place. You know where to find me."

"What do you want with him?"—the girl asked again.

"I want to ask some things about your plans."

"And what is our business to you?"

"I hope there will be no trouble for it."

"I hope there will be no trouble for it."

"I hope there will be no trouble for it."

"I hope there will be no trouble for it."

"I hope there will be no trouble for it."

would force me to make my share of that."

She turned abruptly and walked toward Beck.

The man had purposely held aloof to watch the encounter between the two women. He had been certain that the meeting would be anything but amicable and it was like other situations into which he had let Jane Hunter walk, needlessly and only to see how she would handle herself. Usually the result only amused him, but to-day he had watched Jane bear up admirably under difficult circumstances, refusing to be angered, or confused, or retreating, yet, while retaining dignity, leaving the door to friendship open.

As Jane mounted Bobby Cole stepped back into the cabin with no word and the riders turned back on the way they had come.

"I've been wonderful," Beck said after a time, "how this old coddler wakes up the dust to buy cattle and wire."

Jane did not reply. She wondered at that, too, but there was another wonder in her mind about another, more human mystery, going back to a night of storm in the heavens and storm in her life. How did Bobby Cole know she had turned Dick Hilton out?

As they went silently, each thinking of significant things which had been revealed, the girl threw back the curtain in the doorway and watched them.

"I hate you!" she whispered at Jane Hunter. "I hate you! . . . Because you turned him out! . . . Because you're . . . you're you're . . ."

She stood a long time watching them and with the darkness in her face another quality finally mingled: that envy again.

After a time Jane said:

"A queer creature, that girl."

"On the peak from the start!" Beck replied.

"A beautiful!"

"I've seen 'em before, kids of movers like that, not so good looking, not so smart as she is, but like her because they were always suspicious, always ready to scrap."

"That's because they've never had a chance to be decent, brought up in a wretched sort of life. How did you know that?"

"A shame!" Jane whispered.

"I like kids," he said later, as though his mind had been on nothing else for a long time. "I feel sorry for a lot of 'em . . . for most of 'em . . . Every kid that's born ought to have a chance, a fair show to get on his feet, because the old world don't seem to like kids any too much."

"That girl didn't have a chance, never will have it. She was marked from the day she was born."

"Why, ma'am, one winter I worked for a cow man down in the Salt River valley which is in Arizona. He didn't have a big outfit, but he didn't have much luck; trouble with his water, his cattle got sick and his horses didn't do well and he had just one deer or two left to eat."

"But he had three kids, in a row they seemed, 'indicating the progressive heights with his hand. 'I've ever seen 'em always think of 'em when I see kids that've had to grow up like that girl. I remember those women when I used to start out for a day's ride, looking back and seeing those kids playing in the dirt beside the rose bushes. Their clothes was dirty the minute they stepped outside and the dirt was on their faces was a sight from the 'dobe, but there was roses in their cheeks as bright as 'til roses on the bushes and they smiled loud and their eyes always smiled."

"This man and his wife just buckled down and buckled old Mister Hank from the 'dobe, and for them kids! They sure thought the world of 'em. I guess that was what put the roses in their cheeks and the smiles in their eyes."

"I'll never forget those kids by the rose bushes with somebody to care for 'em and work their hearts out for 'em. That's the way kids ought to grow up; not like that catamunt grew up."

He smiled in reminiscence, and his smile was tender.

"Honey and kids," he repeated after a while. "They ought to be together. He looked at Jane and saw that her eyes were filmed.

She rode closer to him, until her knee touched his, and said:

"I think that is beautiful. Roses and kids. I shall always remember it, always."

She looked over the man she loved, the man whose love she would give him behind that exasperating front of caution. His clear eyes and keen mind were interested only in realities and yet he could display a tenderness more delicate than she had ever before encountered in men. He was strong, and as gentle as he was strong, and he was generous while a skeptic; he had poise and personality.

CHAPTER XI.

THE water in Devil's Hole was fenced.

It was the Reverend who brought word of the fencing. He had made a circuit of the ranches, holding services and selling pens, and on his way back from the lower reaches of Coyote Creek he stopped to call on the Coles. His visit was not financially productive but he did see long rows of posts set by three Mexicans, and saw wire being stretched.

Another thing he saw, which he did not mention to Hepburn. He saw Bobby Cole riding beside a man, and the other was talking to him. He saw Bobby Cole riding beside a man, and the other was talking to him. He saw Bobby Cole riding beside a man, and the other was talking to him.

The fencing stirred the country as nothing had done since the first and only time sheep bands attempted to come in. There was talk of it in town, there was talk of it when men met on trail or road, there was talk of it in ranch houses down the creek and there was talk of it wherever, at length, in stealthy jubilation.

Talley of the Bar Z rode the thirty miles from his ranch to discuss it with Jane Hunter.

(Another Exciting Chapter Monday.)

## MAJOR LEAGUE AVERAGES

The following records include games played Wednesday, April 28:

NATIONAL LEAGUE BATTING.

1	Travis, Phil	40	8	13	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	
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